9: Thomas T-5 (1951-1955)1959
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is a painful procedure. The cuts are made on the thighs and forehead with a knife or ax blade, then charcoal is rubbed in, but the woman told us later that in her case it had been worth the pain and trouble because, she said, she was extremely ugly and had been made more beautiful.

Her baby's name was Nhwakwe, she told me, and after that we were at a loss for conversation. I offered her a cigarette, which she declined, indicating that it made her cough. I was surprised, for she was the only Bushman I had ever met, man, woman, or child, who did not smoke.

Presently she smiled, pressed her hand to her chest, and said: "Tsetchwe." It was her name.

"Elizabeth," I said, pointing to myself.

"Nisabe," she answered, pronouncing after me and inclining her head graciously. She looked me over carefully without really staring, which to Bushmen is rude. Then, having surely suspected that I was a woman, she put her hand on my breast gravely, and, finding that I was, she gravely touched her own breast. Many Bushmen do this; to them all Europeans look the same.

"*Tsau si*" (women), she said.

Then after a moment's pause, Tsetchwe began to teach me a few words, the names of a few objects around us, grass, rock, bean shell, so that we could have a conversation later. As she talked she took a handful of the beans out of her kaross, broke them open, and began to eat them. This is a wonderful, bitter bean, shaped like a lima bean, which grows on tiny bushes in patches throughout the Kalahari. When you eat these beans they burn your tongue, throat, and stomach, but they take away hunger and thirst. Besides the beans in her kaross, Tsetchwe, who began unloading, brought out a large, edible root which she had dug up—she must have been gathering food before we came—and put it in the shade of a

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bush beside her fireplace. Also, she brought out six round green melons which are called *tsama* melons, and which, during the autumn, provide the only liquid available for all the Bushmen in the desert, and for all the game antelope besides. Under the green rind a tsama is very like a watermelon, filled with small oval seeds and very watery in texture, but is itself pale green and smaller, the size of a small cantaloupe. Tsetchwe placed one between her feet and, gripping it firmly with her strong toes, chopped a hole in the top of it with her digging-stick; then, lifting the cap away like the lid of a jack-o'-lantern, she mashed the pulp inside until it was liquid. She put the melon to her mouth and, tipping her head back, drank from it, using her long digging-stick to help push the pulp into her mouth, working it like an enormous chopstick, making a watery noise as she sucked. When Tsetchwe had collected a mouthful of seeds she put the melon down, took an old, dry tsama melon rind from her kaross, and spat the seeds into it to save them, for they can be roasted and eaten like nuts when they are dry. Tsetchwe drank all the liquid in the rind and seemed refreshed as she cast the empty rind over her shoulder and brushed off her mouth and hands.

At last Gai strode back into the werf, followed at a distance by a group of three small boys and, much farther, by three old women who stood waist-deep in bushes, close together like three antelope, craning their necks to see us.

When they noticed Tsetchwe and Ukwane, they came forward with more confidence, accepted tobacco, and, squatting immediately, began to smoke. It had been months, Ukwane said, since they had used their last tobacco, had been reduced to smoking leaves, and they were very happy to have the tobacco we had give them. Bushmen love to smoke. They say that tobacco, as well as the wild beans, takes away hunger and thirst, and, besides that, it makes their hearts glad. One

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Twikwe was a lanky old woman. She sometimes wound a medicine string around her belly to ward hunger away.

This is Gai's house, this bare sand
under the branch of a tree.

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more. Twikwe herself had among her possessions a fiber string, which, she said, she kept to wind around her belly when she was very hungry for the purpose of warding the hunger away.

Wite was tired and cross, and his patience was worn thin by hunger, and when he saw what his mother was doing he realized that he would have less food than he had expected. He lost his temper, shrieked at Twikwe, and tried to keep her from reaching the little rind so that she would have no container to give him a smaller share in—a very Bushman-like thing to do, instead of trying to snatch the large, full rind, perhaps—and the two of them struggled, each tugging at the little rind and each exclaiming wildly. The old woman won the struggle and filled the rind with soup, using her tortoise shell as a spoon, hindered once again by Wite, who snatched the spoon away, still trying to prevent her filling the small rind for him. Twikwe struggled for the spoon, and, seeing that he was going to lose it, Wite quickly ladled an extra spoonful into the little rind and sat back resigned while Twikwe thrust the little rind toward him. He took it finally and sat sulkily, not eating, but with his lips pressed against the side of the rind, his eyes hard and shining, staring at nothing over the top. Twikwe handed the larger share to Kutera, who pretended not to have noticed the struggle and who thanked Twikwe in an ingratiating way.

There was another struggle over food that evening, started as a malicious joke by Gai. When Gai saw Wite with a strip of meat from the gemsbok's cheek he snatched it out of Wite's hand and pretended to eat it. When Wite, tried beyond endurance, burst into tears and flew at Gai, Gai ran away and really did eat the meat, chewing as he ran, keeping just out of Wite's reach. The chase ended under a tree, where Gai, seizing a branch, grappled Wite with his legs and swung

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224 602 they are present, and to other kin, affines, and friends who are there, possibly only in small quantities by then.

Everyone who receives meat gives again, in another wave of sharing, to his or her parents, parents-in-law, spouses, offspring, siblings, and others. [574] This meat may be cooked and the quantities small. Visitors receive small amounts of cooked meat from their hosts. It ends in everybody getting some meat.

224 431 In the later waves of sharing, when the primary distribution and primary kinship obligations have been fulfilled, the giving of meat from one's own portion has the quality of gift giving. !Kung society requires at this point only that a person should give with reasonable generosity in proportion to what he has received and not keep more than an equitable amount for himself, and that the person who receives a gift of meat must give a reciprocal gift of meat at some time in the future. People give to whom they please, this time to some, next time to others, more generously or less generously [571] according to their own (to us often unfathomable) reasons. We are certain, however, that the motives are the same as in gift giving in general: the person gives to measure up to what is expected of him, to make friendly gestures, to win favor, to repay past favors and obligations, and to enmesh others in future obligation.

224 431 181 [154] [103] Aside from the practical advantage of using up meat while it is still fresh, the !Kung custom of meat sharing has enormous social value. It does a great deal to mitigate tensions. The fear of hunger is lessened. People are sustained by a web of mutual obligation. Moreover, they are fully conscious of these values, and the custom is so strongly established and so faithfully followed that the idea of not sharing is virtually unthinkable to the !Kung.

422 262 264 Meat is not habitually cooked and eaten as a family meal among the !Kung. When an individual receives a portion he owns it outright. He may give and share it further, as he wishes, but it never becomes family or group property. The men, women, and children may cook their pieces when and as they wish, often roasting bits in the coals and hot ashes and eating them alone at odd times. Or someone may start a big pot boiling and several people will bring their pieces to put into it at the same time, each taking his own piece out when it is cooked.

The sense of possessing one's own piece personally is, I believe, very [261] important to the !Kung. It gives one the responsibility of choosing when to eat one's meat and struggling with hunger as best one can when it is finished, without occasion or excuse for blaming others for eating more than their share.

224 261 It has often been reported that, when Bushmen kill an animal, they gorge themselves until they can hardly walk. We have seen the Nyae Nyae !Kung eat hearty meals of meat when plenty appeared and they had been long without, but nothing more than we considered a normal amount.

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They hang meat in the bushes to dry and can keep it for some time. It is not uncommon for them to eat quite sparingly and save bits for a coming journey or against a future day of hunger, as they eat sparingly of mangetti nuts and *tsi* when they must make a supply they have carried from a great distance last as long as possible.

The !Kung are well accustomed to restraining themselves in regard to food. Thus when a visitor comes to a fire where people are preparing food or eating, he should sit at a discreet distance, not to seem importunate, and wait to be asked to share.

Although the hunters supply only about a fifth of the people's food and the women four fifths, the women play a dependent role in !Kung society. Nevertheless, the men do not ill-treat the women and require no extreme form of obedience or subservience of them.

The primary factor in the dominance of the men is undoubtedly strength. !Kung men are small and slender, but they are wiry and vigorous and, with their strength, they carry and protect the very life of their people.

Another factor that brings men clearly forward is the character of hunting and its reward. Women bring the daily food, but there is nothing splendid about returning with vegetables and wood. Many of the vegetable foods, furthermore, are rather tasteless and harsh and are not very satisfying. The return of the hunters is vastly different. The intense craving for meat, the anxiety that goes with the hunt, the deep excitement of the kill, finally the eating and the satisfaction reach to the very core of the people, engaging powerful emotions. Once a young man, /Qui, who was said to be the best hunter in the region, had been charged by a magnificent cock ostrich on a big open pan where there was no refuge. He knelt, facing the creature, until it was within close range and shot an arrow straight into its heart. Back in the werf, while the meat was being cut up and distributed by /Qui's wife's brothers, he slept exhausted on the mound of black and white plumes and the women—some of the plumes in their hair—danced a dance of praise around him. This is the role of !Kung hunters.

MATERIAL CULTURE

HOUSE TYPE AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN • The building of the scherm—the Bushman reed-and-grass dwelling—is women's work, associated with vegetation and gathering. Each woman builds for her own family. However, unless no better shade can be found or unless it is raining, the women often do not bother to build these shelters. Especially after the long days of walking, it is easier just to settle in the bushes.

In the Nyae Nyae region, wood and grass are everywhere, and a woman can gather her material and build her scherm in less than an hour. She breaks up flexible branches about six feet long, digs holes with her